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Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

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Four educators named Wisconsin Teachers of the Year

MADISON—"Innovative, hard working, dedicated, inspired, creative. These are among the words of praise used to describe the four educators named to the 2005-06 Teacher of the Year program," said State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster.

"These educators exemplify the many fine teachers who work with young people every school day, contributing countless hours both inside and outside the classroom to our students' academic and social development," Burmaster added.

The teachers, also recipients of Herb Kohl Educational Foundation Teacher Fellowships in spring 2005, are

- Mary Feldt of Almond, elementary physical education teacher at the Waupaca Learning Center;
- Edith Krueger, social studies and language arts teacher at Stanley-Boyd Middle School;
- Linda Gabby, English teacher at Wauwatosa East High School; and
- Anne Reece, special education teacher at Converse Elementary School in Beloit.

A panel of educators, parents, and community leaders selected the four from a pool of 86 Kohl Teacher Fellows. Teachers of the Year are selected for their ability to inspire students' love of learning, instructional innovation and leadership, and commitment to community involvement. Later this month, the same committee will choose one Teacher of the Year to represent Wisconsin in the National Teacher of the Year program.

Elementary Teacher of the Year Mary Feldt

"I love my job. I live my job," Feldt said of her methods for inspiring students' learning. "It is my commitment as a physical education teacher to prepare students for their future." Noting that far too many

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adults suffered embarrassment and failure in physical education classes, she says she strives “to instill in my students the enjoyment of movement and play.”

Feldt takes physical education beyond traditional team sports to offer lots of opportunities for lifetime activities and cooperative games with “participation taking precedence over competition.” She says, “I often tell my students that 20 years from now they aren’t likely to run into 25 of their friends and start a game of dodge ball. However, they may enjoy walking, dancing, a round of golf, or another physical activity.” Thus, Feldt teaches outdoor education skills, including cross country skiing, snow shoeing, curling, walking, and hiking among activities in her classes. A recently developed Enviro-Camp took students and parents camping in a nearby state park to combine environmental education and physical activity in a “meaningful and fun outdoor experience.” A student’s comment about the fun of using a wheelchair turned into lessons exposing students to the many daily activities they take for granted. Feldt’s Wheelchair Obstacle course was among lessons she had accepted for publication on the PECentral website.

Practicing what she preaches, Feldt’s students will see her join them in class, walk during her lunch break, kayak at a state park, or participate in a local sporting event. “The success of a physically educated person is not necessarily determined by a test or an isolated athletic performance,” Feldt said. “That success, or lack of it, may not be evident for years. My goal in preparing students is that they will pursue some type of physical activity for personal fitness and enjoyment in their future.”

Feldt is an active community volunteer, who took the Movin’ Schools campaign to Waupaca’s Movin’ Community program. She also has been involved in youth sports, Cub Scouts, community food drives, roadside clean-ups, Bread Basket, the school district’s wellness committee, and the Waupaca County Nutrition and Activity coalition.

She holds a bachelor’s degree in wellness and health promotions and a master’s degree in physical education from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

Middle School Teacher of the Year Edith Krueger

Describing her own education in a one-room school, under the guidance of her teacher Mrs. Siverhus, as what most influenced her thoughts on education and teaching and determined her career choice, Krueger said, “I wanted to be able to impact children the way she had impacted so many of her students.” From the genuine concern and caring, to the encouragement tailored to each individual, to her ability to inspire parents to be a vital part of the school community, Krueger’s childhood teacher’s lessons

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are in the forefront of how Krueger approaches teaching. “Regardless of age, a child’s curiosity and willingness to learn is best fostered in a safe and nurturing environment,” she said.

Krueger makes connections with her middle school charges in various ways and says the times she has served as a mentor for students who sought her out as an ear for their problems, a mediator for their relationships, or a tutor for classes that were a struggle have been the most rewarding of her career. Krueger treats her students as individuals and challenges them to set goals and work toward them. One parent remarked that her child became a scholar during his time in Krueger’s classroom, gaining two and a half years on a standardized reading test and amazing his parents with the academic standards he had set for himself. “I see my boy works so hard for this lady, I’d work hard for her too,” the parent said after her first parent-teacher conference.

Because she works in a small rural community, Krueger strives to bring the world into the classroom. Stanley-Boyd has been host to Japanese and Korean visiting teachers, and Krueger’s trip to Italy provided first-hand lessons on Rome, the Renaissance, and Italian culture. A former student, recalled the experience of learning to write, speak, sing, and read in Japanese as one of many experiences in Krueger’s classroom that made her classes his favorite hours of the day. Cody Schuebel said that Krueger made sure her students not only understood the lesson but enjoyed it too.

Krueger holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. She began her career as a special education teacher at Stanley Elementary School and started teaching middle school in 2000.

High School Teacher of the Year Linda Gabby

The goals that fuel her work others might call challenges. Gabby looks at the students who come to high school already disengaged, have a long history of failing or underachievement, abuse alcohol and drugs, or struggle with life issues teens shouldn’t have to face along with those who are voracious readers and prolific writers and thinkers who have other issues that block their potential and sees her passion “to love her students through their pain and heartache and support them in their learning.”

Gabby’s route to becoming an English teacher started at Spring Hill College in Mobile, Ala., where she student taught at a rural high school. She detoured to graduate school followed by stints as a teacher of severely disabled middle school readers, administrator of an elementary reading program,

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work as a reading specialist, and instructor in the department of reading and language arts at Cardinal Stritch College in Milwaukee. “I did all of this—only to realize that what I really wanted to do was teach English,” she said.

Programs Gabby has developed throughout her career have sprung from problems she saw that needed to be addressed. During her first years of teaching remedial reading, Gabby discovered that her students didn’t own a single book. She sponsored book fairs to purchase trade books for her students to have as their own. Through her efforts, Wauwatosa East now has an accelerated English class for exceptionally bright ninth-graders. She helped create a Homework Club after school to provide immediate assistance for students who have missed assignments. She also has pioneered standards-based grading in her classroom. Gabby is the coordinator for the school’s National Mix It Up at Lunch Day, which encourages students to develop tolerance and acceptance of other by dining with students outside of their usual social group.

A parent of a high school student with learning disabilities praised Gabby’s efforts to develop strategies and structure that allowed her son’s confidence and appreciation of reading to blossom. The parent thanked Gabby for validating her son’s “potential and teaching to his strengths to improve his reading and writing, allowing him to move closer to realizing his dreams, and not letting the LD part of who he is determine what he can achieve and become.”

Gabby calls service a core value in her life. She is the adviser for the school’s Amnesty International Chapter, which has sponsored petitions, letter writing campaigns, and an annual benefit concert with proceeds donated to various charitable organizations. She also initiated a monthly Mother’s Kitchen project that serves chili and salad to the homeless and coordinates the annual Christmas party for mentally ill adults at Plymouth Manor.

In addition to her bachelor’s degree from Spring Hill College, Gabby holds a master’s degree from the University of Illinois-Champaign Urbana.

Special Services Teacher of the Year Anne Reece

Called the greatest support system a teacher could have when servicing special needs children, Reese uses various learning tools and consults with regular education teachers daily to help her instill a love of learning in students. “Many of the students that I work with have had a history of academic

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failure,” she said, “rather than pretend I am not aware of this, I tell them that it is my job to help them find the way(s) that they learn best.”

Her efforts to help students succeed have led to technology, using computers and special software to make learning fun. A word predication program used in conjunction with a talking word processor and customized activities have helped her students improve their spelling and writing skills. Independent reading skills get structure through books and tapes that break the 40-minute task into smaller, more manageable pieces, and are accompanied by charts that show visual progress toward the reading goal. To support students’ organizational skills, Reece develops a personalized schedule that helps students learn to read schedules, gives them responsibility to do what the schedule says, and provides opportunities to ask for assistance from a peer or an adult.

Parents of one of Reece’s students spoke of the pride they felt at their child’s last conference before moving to seventh grade. Their son had started life in Wisconsin very far behind his peers and ended sixth grade with primarily A and B grades. “Best of all, he was doing regular sixth-grade work that was not being modified,” they said.

Reece is active in school-wide activities for Veterans Day and Woman’s History Month as well as the “Wall of Honor,” which display’s student work in the entryway of the school and has received much parent and community attention. “No child should ever feel left out,” she said of the wall. “Every child should be involved in the school community. Each student in the school contributes a little piece to a beautiful display that everyone is proud of.”

Prior to joining the Beloit School District, Reese taught in the Albany School District. She holds a bachelor’s degree from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater and a master’s degree from National-Louis University

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